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The State of Access to Food and Nutrition in Montana

Report of the:

Montana State Advisory Council
on Food and Nutrition

November, 1994

Montana State Advisory Council on Food and Nutrition

Vision

The Montana State Advisory Council on Food and Nutrition will lead and facilitate the creation of an optimal nutrition environment for all Montanans.

Mission

To provide information and education to policy makers and the public on the state of access to food and nutrition in Montana.

1994 Activities

Forums

An important duty of the Council is to provide a forum for review and discussion of state policies affecting hunger, food programs and the nutritional status of the population at risk. In 1994, the Council supported three such discussions:

- ▶ Proposed changes in the regulations for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); March, Helena.
- ▶ Results of Dr. Paul Miller's 1993 study of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR); May, Crow Agency.
- ▶ Nutrition education as part of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR); October, Great Falls.

Awards

The Council identified 14 individuals and groups who deserved recognition for their efforts to provide food and nutrition services to the citizens of Montana. Governor Marc Racicot presented the awards to recipients during a ceremony at the Hunger and Homelessness Conference. Award recipients were Kasey Dashbach (Bozeman), Lettie Gilbert (St. Ignatius), Eileen and Patrick Hayes (Florence), "Kids Matter" Coalition (Billings), Bob Lamphere (Billings), Judy Mathre (Bozeman), Paul Miller (Missoula), June Munski-Feenan (Whitefish), Mary Musil (Helena), Diann Pommer (Missoula), Alice Pierson (Thompson Falls), Patty Waggle (Dillon), and Mavis Yeager (Conrad).

Collaborative Efforts

The Council continued to coordinate efforts with the Montana Hunger Coalition and the Montana Food Bank Network by participating in the Annual Hunger and Homelessness Conference in Great Falls in October, 1994.

The Problem Today

Empty plate, empty hopes. Lack of food a growing problem. More Montanans going hungry. These are a few bylines which appeared in newspapers across Montana in the past year documenting the increased problem of hunger. The problems of hunger and inadequate nutrition are not going away. In fact, more and more Montanans who never thought they would need help are turning to public assistance programs and emergency food sources like food banks and soup kitchens.

These are people who have lost their jobs and cannot find new ones. These are people working at minimum-wage jobs and cannot rise out of poverty. These are people paying a disproportionately high percentage of their income for rent. These are people without health insurance. Look into the faces of poverty and hunger in Montana and see children, the elderly and people with disabilities. There are many Montanans who find it difficult to believe others within their communities go to bed hungry.

Many Montanans are facing the hunger problem in their communities and working to alleviate or prevent it, especially for children. In Florence, the Hayes family organized an effort to bring back the School Lunch Program after the school board discontinued it. Florence now has both popular School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. The Billings community rallied around the "Kids Matter" coalition and the Billings Public Schools to provide a very successful Summer Feeding Program for children of all ages. Many other Montanans, such as Alice Pierson of Thompson Falls, Mavis Yeager of Conrad, Lettie Gilbert of St. Ignatius, Patty Waggle of Dillon and June Munski-Feenan of Whitefish, have been instrumental in starting community food banks.

The image of food banks and soup kitchens serving only down-on-their-luck single men is far from today's reality. Children make up 42 percent of those served by food banks and 50 percent served by soup kitchens. Is this how we want to feed our children? It is easy to blame adults if they do not have enough to eat, but to not provide the necessary healthy food for children in a nurturing environment suggests we have much work ahead.

Montana is one of the few states in the nation that conducts on-going research on the incidence and causes of hunger in Montana. The research data from Dr. Paul Miller's Montana Hunger Coalition surveys are critical to understanding the unique characteristics of hunger in our state and developing the appropriate policies and programs to alleviate the problem.

The results of Dr. Miller's studies and the Food Assistance Program Utilization data suggest that the need for food and nutrition assistance is on the increase. Are programs able to keep pace with this increased need? The WIC Program has increased participation due to additional federal dollars, but many important programs, such as commodities, are not receiving the federal support to keep pace with the growing need.

Every Montanan can help alleviate the hunger problem which affects more and more people in our communities. Join with many Montanans who have decided it is time for them to do something about the problem, rather than waiting for someone else to assure Montana children do not go to bed hungry.

Profile of Who's Hungry in Montana

According to the 1990 Census data, Montana had the second highest increase in the rate of child poverty. Living in poverty, puts one at risk of hunger. The following reveals who in Montana is living in poverty* as of 1990:

- ▶ 16.1% of Montanans live in poverty
- ▶ 22.9% to 50% of Indians on reservations experience poverty
- ▶ 6.7% of Montanans live in "deep poverty" with incomes less than 50% of poverty
- ▶ 20% of all Montana children under 18 live in poverty
- ▶ 24.3% of all Montana children under age five live in poverty
- ▶ 49.3% of all female-headed families with children under 18 live in poverty
- ▶ 67.1% of all female-headed families with children under five live in poverty

*poverty is defined as a annual income of \$14,355 for a family of four

Studies conducted by Dr. Paul Miller of the Montana Hunger Coalition indicate the following households are most at risk of hunger:

- ▶ female-headed households with young children
- ▶ households in rural counties
- ▶ households seeking employment
- ▶ households receiving food stamps
- ▶ households living in deep poverty
- ▶ households with high housing costs
- ▶ households enrolled in AFDC

STUDY OF THE FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS (FDPIR): 1992-93 (conducted by Dr. Paul Miller at the University of Montana for the Montana Hunger Coalition)

This study of 1,356 households participating in the FDPIR examined hunger and nutrition as they relate to poverty, health and participation in public safety-net programs. Data were gathered on all seven reservations in Montana. Major findings of the study include:

- ▶ 60 percent of households relied on federal food commodities as their main source of food
- ▶ 20 percent of households relied not only on FDPIR, but also food banks, food pantries and congregate feeding sites as their only source of food
- ▶ 6 out of ten households experienced hunger in the previous year by either running out of food or reducing the amount of food eaten due to lack of money
- ▶ half of all households had at least one person working
- ▶ 86 percent of households lived below poverty and 27 percent lived in deep poverty
- ▶ safety-net programs were not fully utilized because of stigma, confusion about eligibility requirements and transportation problems
- ▶ the major health problems were obesity, arthritis and diabetes
- ▶ 6 out of ten respondents do not utilize the expertise of nutritionists.

STUDY OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS IN MONTANA: 1994 (conducted by Dr. Paul Miller at the University of Montana for the Montana Hunger Coalition)

This study of 2,535 third grade students, 179 third grade teachers and 113 principals examined hunger among children in Montana's public schools. Major findings of the study include:

- ▶ although the majority of students reported eating something before school, more than half indicated they felt hungry during morning classes suggesting what they did eat was not adequate
- ▶ 60 percent indicated they felt tired and sleepy during the morning; feeling sleepy and tired is highly correlated with feeling hungry
- ▶ 61 percent reported a grownup did not make breakfast for them or help them make breakfast
- ▶ both teachers and principals agreed the main signs of hunger in students are fatigue, a lack of energy to sustain concentration and complaints of stomach aches and headaches
- ▶ teachers and principals also agreed hungry students experience learning difficulties
- ▶ teachers and principals indicated they hold parents accountable for the hungry children they observe; they recognized several reasons for children's hunger including working parents who leave home early in the morning and parents experiencing poverty and the means to keep nutritious food in the home.

FOOD BANKS AND MEAL PROGRAMS PARTICIPATING IN THE MONTANA FOOD BANK NETWORK: 1990 vs 1993

Today, more Montanans than ever before are finding themselves in need of "emergency" food and are visiting food banks and meal programs such as soup kitchens. Most are independent, hard-working individuals who never thought they might need help one day. Nearly 42 percent of clients served by food banks and 50 percent served by meal programs are children. While these numbers are alarming, they are only part of the picture. Food banks and meal programs that are part of the Montana Food Bank Network report their numbers; there are many agencies that are not in the Network and, therefore, do not report.

Food Banks	Number of clients served (not unduplicated numbers)			
	children	adults	seniors	total
1990	45,269	48,400	8,466	127,377
1993	75,176	88,703	13,298	177,177
Meal Programs	Total number of meals served			
	children	adults	seniors	total
1990	36,965	34,625	35,713	76,228
1993	192,455	84,866	104,890 ¹	382,211

¹ Congregate senior nutrition sites are able to participate in both the Senior Nutrition Program and the Montana Food Bank Network; it appears more sites are doing this. This number may include seniors counted by the Senior Nutrition Program.

Food Assistance Program Utilization: 1990 vs Today*

Food Distribution Program (Commodities) (contact: 444-4545; Gordon Davidson)

<u>Federal Year</u>	<u>Dollar Value of Food Distributed</u>
► 1990	\$4,296,926
► 1994	\$4,372,877

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) (contact: 444-4545; Gordon Davidson)

<u>Federal Year</u>	<u>Average Number of Persons Served Monthly</u>
► 1990	6,410
► 1994	5,259

Senior Nutrition Program (contact: 444-7786; Janet Myren)

<u>Federal Year</u>	<u>Meals Served</u>			<u>Persons Served</u>
	<u>Congregate</u>	<u>Home Delivered</u>	<u>Total</u>	
► 1990	1,324,502	567,238	1,891,740	50,802
► 1993	1,246,253	603,452	1,849,705	47,967 ¹

1. Decrease in persons served matches a national trend & may be attributed to the fact that "younger" seniors do not participate in the program.

Food Stamp Program (contact: 444-4545; Bonnie McElroy)

<u>Federal Year</u>	<u>Average # of Households/Month</u>	<u>Average Dollars per Household per Month</u>	<u>Total Dollar Value for Year</u>
► 1990	21,052	\$155.75	\$39,347,072
► 1994	27,600	\$167.31	\$55,413,520

Child and Adult Care Food Program (contact: 444-2674; Nolan Malstrom)

<u>State Year</u>	<u>Meals Served</u>	<u>Dollar Value</u>
► 1990	4.9 million	\$4.0 million
► 1994	7.3 million	\$6.3 million

Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) (contact: 444-4747; Dave Thomas)

<u>State Year</u>	<u>Number of Participants (Monthly Average)</u>			
	<u>Women</u>	<u>Infants</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Total</u>
► 1990	2,460	3,600	8,490	14,552
► 1994	3,288	4,258	11,531	19,077

School Meals Program (contact: 444-2505; Gary Watt)

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Student Meals Served</u>			
	<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Lunch</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Free/Reduced</u>
► 1990-1991	1,221,211	14,035,930	15,257,141	39,747
► 1993-1994	1,999,387	14,308,038	16,307,425	57,849

*Latest year for which data is available

Recommendations for Change

What Individuals Can Do*

- ▶ Donate food, money and time to local food programs.
- ▶ Become well-informed about hunger, then become an anti-hunger advocate.
- ▶ Seek out and listen to those in need.

What Religious Groups Can Do*

- ▶ Ensure the mission of serving others is central to the group's activities.
- ▶ Invite representatives from the Council, the Montana Hunger Coalition or the Montana Food Bank Network to speak to the congregation.
- ▶ Sponsor food drives and organize members to volunteer at food banks/pantries and soup kitchens.

What Communities/Agencies Can Do*

- ▶ Work collaboratively with other communities/agencies serving low-income people to coordinate services, integrate programs and eliminate duplication.
- ▶ Consult with low-income people before designing programs that are meant to serve their needs.
- ▶ Initiate new programs; for example, there may be communities that need food banks, volunteers to deliver Meals-on-Wheels, or family-oriented soup kitchens.

What Business Can Do*

- ▶ Sponsor job training programs for displaced workers.
- ▶ Pay employees salaries that keep them out of poverty (in 1992, a minimum-wage salary leaves a three-person family \$2,300 below the federal poverty line of \$11,280 per year).
- ▶ Donate money and in-kind services to emergency food programs and encourage employees to volunteer.

What Government Can Do (as recommended by the Montana State Advisory Council on Food and Nutrition)

- ▶ Mandate nutrition education, including product information and thrifty shopping, for all food stamp clients.
- ▶ Guarantee culturally appropriate nutrition education for FDPIR clients.
- ▶ Ensure the nutritional quality of commodity foods to include fresh fruits and vegetables, and foods with reduced levels of fat, salt and sugar.
- ▶ Expand outreach efforts for public food programs to reach all who are eligible.
- ▶ Research, in depth, the causes of poverty in Montana and their contributes to hunger.
- ▶ Improve the availability of jobs with livable wages, low-rent housing, subsidized child care and health care.
- ▶ Maintain benefits for families living barely above poverty until they are able to reach a livable income level.
- ▶ Guarantee public food assistance programs in all areas of the state.
- ▶ Revamp food program benefits to keep pace with current needs in terms of food allowance and nutritional quality.

*Adapted from *Hunger in the Midst of Affluence* by the Contra Costa County Hunger Task Force

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